

Wisconsin Subsidized Guardianship Program

The Subsidized Guardianship Program is part of a comprehensive Guardianship Permanency Initiative to improve permanency outcomes for children in out-of-home care by promoting the use of permanent legal guardianship as a permanency option. While guardianship has long existed as a permanency outcome for children, the lack of ongoing payments to guardians to care for children once permanency has been achieved has limited the effectiveness of guardianship as a permanency outcome and results in foster care cases remaining open longer than necessary to continue payments to the caretakers.

The Subsidized Guardianship program will be operated under a federal Title IV-E waiver to provide ongoing payments to persons becoming legal guardians of children in foster care, similar to the adoption assistance program for children who are adopted. The target population for the Subsidized Guardianship program is children placed with relatives licensed as foster parents. The subsidized guardianship program will make guardianship more feasible as a permanency outcome and improve the permanency options available for children placed with relatives.

The Guardianship Permanency Initiative is based on the following principles:

- Improving permanency outcomes for children and families through more effective permanency planning that is family-focused.
- Promoting the use of relatives as foster care placement resources.
- Ensuring the safety and well being of children through permanent placements with caring adults whom will raise the children to adulthood.
- Providing services to families in ways that address the needs of children but minimizes the public child welfare involvement in the lives of families.
- Operating the subsidized guardianship program in a manner similar to the adoption assistance program.

The federal waiver request was approved in September 2004. State enabling legislation to clarify the use of guardianship as a permanency option and establish the subsidized guardianship payment program was approved as part of the Governor's 2005-2007 state budget bill, 2005 Wis. Act 25. Initial implementation of the Subsidized Guardianship program is planned for September 2005. Once implemented, the program can be operated for five years under the federal waiver, which can be renewed.

The subsidized guardianship program will be implemented initially in Milwaukee County by the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Approximately 175 children with existing guardianship orders will be converted to subsidized guardianship in the Fall of 2005. A guardianship subsidy agreement must be completed before payments can be made to guardian caretakers. Approximately 650 children in Milwaukee will be part of the target population for the program over the 5-year period. The waiver request includes the potential to expand the program to the rest of the state, although no timeframe has been set for expansion of the program.

As a condition of the federal waiver, the guardianship program must be cost neutral to the federal government and an independent program evaluation including random assignment of cases must be conducted. Target population cases will be assigned to experimental and control groups for evaluation purposes, with only the experimental group being eligible for subsidized guardianship payments.